



GreenActive

From the Greens federal and NSW parliamentary teams

Save public transport

Does Transport Minister Michael Costa hate trains? It's certainly starting to look that way.

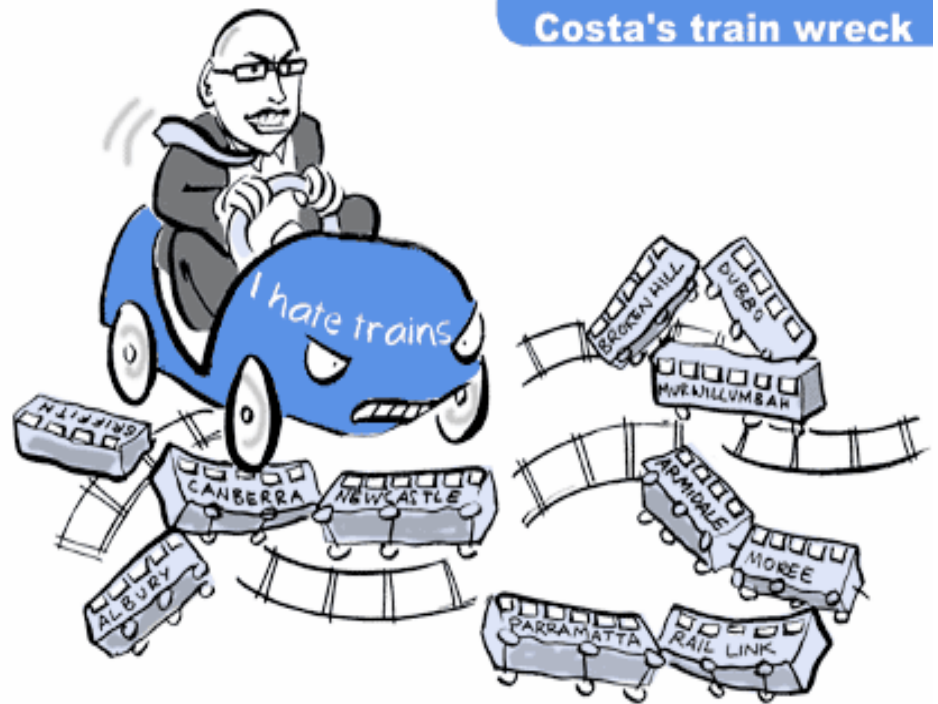
The Parramatta Rail Link has been cut in half, breaking a promise Labor took into three elections. A plan is being pushed through to rip up the railway into Newcastle from Broadmeadow. And country rail services are being downgraded. To top it off, plans for high-speed links from Wollongong and Newcastle have disappeared from view.

All in all, Costa is shaping up as the worst Transport Minister in the history of NSW.

The Greens have been campaigning for improved rail services for NSW. A 'People Train' protest in support of the Parramatta Rail Link was held at Epping Station on Thursday November 6, attended by over 50

residents and transport activists. In October, Lee Rhiannon addressed a public meeting in Newcastle of 452 people energised by the threat to their

trains. In Parliament, Lee has asked Costa to deny that all CountryLink trains will go - he refused to answer.



Costa's train wreck

Treatment of asylum seekers— our national shame

The close of an eventful year is a good opportunity to reflect on the circumstances of those around us who struggle desperately to keep life and family intact. We need to ponder what it must mean for a family, driven by war or human rights abuse, to pack up a few belongings, leave relatives, friends and their homeland, in search of safety and freedom and a peaceful of safety

life. There are over 23 million people officially recognised by the United Nations as refugees and more than this number who are listed as displaced people fleeing for their lives to foreign countries.

Women and children make up 80% of refugees who are seeking a safe haven in a place where human rights are

upheld and compassion for those in need is a given. That could be Australia. It has often been Australia in the past. However the Howard coalition government and the Labor opposition are very much threatening our reputation as a nation willing to support genuine refugees and asylum seekers.

Continued on page 2

...Continued from page 1

We need to develop community-based security and health checking systems for asylum seekers until their refugee status is determined. We must ensure that asylum seekers have access to legal and social services during any transition period. We need to abolish the present inhumane mandatory detention regime, the one so enthusiastically promoted and enforced by former Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock.

Greens MP Michael Organ will be continuing to work hard on promoting the cause of asylum seekers, pressuring the Minister in parliament, meeting with detainees in detention centres and assisting individuals wherever possible, and speaking out on this issue in his electorate of Cunningham

Save Local Government

Following uproar among councils, intense lobbying and protests the NSW government withdrew its controversial Local Government Bill. This is a major setback for the Premier's program of forced amalgamations and a huge victory for the right of residents to decide their local representation. Sylvia Hale alerted councils and shires around the state when this bill was first announced by the government.

The response was overwhelming with sustained lobbying that saw MPs deluged with faxes, emails and phone calls. The opposition to the bill culminated in a 7,000 strong protest that blocked the Macquarie Street traffic outside Parliament House. Council workers and residents from across NSW came to Sydney for the protest.

The Premier wanted this Bill passed before the end of 2003 so that he could force through amalgamations before next year's local government elections. Now the whole Government timetable of forced amalgamations is

in trouble. If the bill had become law it would have allowed the Minister for Local Government arbitrary power over most aspects of Local Government.

These are the main points to this Bill, which the NSW Government may attempt to bring in again in early 2004

- ◆ Community participation in boundary change and amalgamation would be abolished.
- ◆ The Boundaries Commission could perform a 'snap' dissolution of a Council area without the proposal being put to a public inquiry.
- ◆ The Government would find it easier to gerrymander councils, because the legislation does away with the need for a referendum to decide a change in the Council's ward structure or the number of councillors
- ◆ The Minister would exercise direct control over Council's rates and general income levels.
- ◆ The Minister can have direct involvement in Council affairs by inserting a Committee into the Council structure, with a mission and makeup decided by the Minister.
- ◆ The Minister would have the power to remove the right of voters to directly elect their mayor, and to alter the length of the Mayor's term in office.
- ◆ The Minister will be able to postpone elections for up to 24 months.
- ◆ The Minister can make decisions such as sacking or keeping staff and selling off council assets after amalgamations have taken place.
- ◆ Government decisions about amalgamations and other changes will be exempt from review by the courts.
- ◆ Councils will be given power to pass censure motions against other Councillors possibly leading to 1-6 month suspensions from meetings and/or pay. Minority Councillors would be vulnerable to majority

Councillors unfairly suspending them. The Greens mobilised quickly to stop the Bill. Sylvia wrote to all the Councils in NSW alerting them, as well as to all our local government supporters. We set up a website at www.nsw.greens.org.au/sylvia, where people could download form letters, petitions, addresses and phone numbers of MPs and information to campaign against the Bill.

Collex Mega-Tip

Sylvia and Ian have been working together to support residents from Clyde in upholding the Land and Environment Court's decision to disallow a massive waste transfer station in Clyde from being built.

The government has already signed a \$20 billion dollar deal with the waste management company Collex to build the transfer station in Clyde to allow rubbish from Sydney to be shipped out to a new mega-tip in Goulburn. The deal was signed before approval was given for the site.

Local residents took the case to the Land and Environment Court and their case was upheld on all counts. After losing the court case, the government rushed legislation through Parliament to reverse the Court's decision.

The Greens will continue to work with the community to ensure this mega waste transfer station does not go ahead.

Teachers' salaries

The Greens are supporting the claim by public school teachers for a fair and reasonable pay rise. On October 29 Lee Rhiannon moved a motion in the Upper House calling on the House to "recognise the inherent justice of the claim of the NSW Teachers Federation for a 25% salary increase". The motion to start the debate failed when Labor and the Coalition opposed it.

Workplace deaths

The Upper House has established an Inquiry into the recent workplace deaths of Joel Exner and Dean McGoldrick, two young men who tragically and unnecessarily lost their lives on the job.

This move comes after the revelation that even when employers have been prosecuted for the death of an employee, often the fines simply go unpaid. The Greens are pushing for Industrial Manslaughter legislation so that employers, if proved to be reckless and negligent, could be sent to jail following the death of a worker.

M5 East tunnel unsafe

Lee Rhiannon used Upper House procedures to force the release of papers relating to the M5 East tunnel. What they revealed is that NSW Health wants signs erected saying: "Tunnel Ahead. Close all windows and vents." The air in the tunnel is highly polluted.

The Roads and Traffic Authority is refusing to put up the signs. The Greens had their own sign made, and on October 26 Lee Rhiannon and local residents erected it at the tunnel entrance in Arncliffe. Sadly, the RTA made sure that not many motorists saw this valuable health advice.

Euthanasia trial bill

NSW Parliament failed to recognise the will of the people when it prevented a referendum on voluntary euthanasia taking place at the next state election. Ian Cohen's Voluntary Euthanasia Trial (Referendum) Bill, which was rejected in the Upper House in November, called for a referendum to establish an 18 month legally and medically supervised trial of voluntary euthanasia.

The major parties refused to allow a conscience vote to take place, denying any opportunity for the public to make a choice. But, the most recent opinion

polls confirm a 30 year trend of majority public support for voluntary euthanasia.

As recently as June last year, Roy Morgan Research found 73 per cent of people in NSW, Victoria and South Australia believed doctors should be allowed to assist hopelessly ill patients to die.

Greens go Bush

The response to the actions of Greens Senators Bob Brown and Kerry Nettle in Federal Parliament during Bush's visit has been enormous. The positive feedback we have received from around the globe has swamped the less supportive feedback we received.

Here is an example of an email we received:

I congratulate you on your courage and principle. You have secured for yourself an honoured place in the dissenting history of Australia, and a treasured place in the memories and hearts of the many Australians who are sickened by the Bush visit and the timid genuflections of the ALP.

The fate of the Australians David Hicks and Mamdouh Habib continues to be in the news. UK detainees at Guantanamo Bay may be returned to the UK to face trial. The Greens have called on Howard to do the same. Why should Australians be treated worse than US and UK citizens? The need for Greens voices in our parliaments has been again highlighted by these events.

Video mobile phone towers

Sylvia has been lending support to community groups fighting the construction of new video technology phone towers. New transmission towers need to be built for these phones, as the maximum distance between towers for reliable reception is around 1.5km. Ordinary mobiles require towers around every 5km.

Many of these towers are being built on public land, which means Council approval is needed. Sylvia spoke at a public meeting of Oatley residents, whose win in the High Court on this issue is being ignored by the telco Hutchison

Pressure on GM trials

The NSW Government is under pressure to enforce its three-year ban on commercial genetically modified (GM) crops and reject an application that seeks to test commercial markets in Australia and overseas. Ian Cohen called on Agriculture Minister Ian MacDonald to table documents prepared by biotech companies Bayer and Monsanto that seek a 5000-hectare trial of GM canola.

The government promised a three-year ban to protect farmers and consumers until we know more about GM crops. The Minister must now prove that he is not considering allowing a proposed 5000-hectare trial to include producing GM seed to test markets here and overseas. The proposed trial includes a "seed production demonstration trial" 600-hectares in size, spread over six locations. 600-hectares of seed production would generate a thousand tonnes of GM seed - enough to plant out 200,000-hectares of GM canola.

It is clear that Bayer and Monsanto are thumbing their noses at concerns farmers and consumers have expressed and simply exploiting a trial to stockpile GM seed for use once a moratorium ends.

Sand mining threat

The Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area could be placed on the international "In Danger" list if a proposed 27 million tonne sand mine goes ahead at Newnes, 50 metres from the boundary of the conservation area. Ian Cohen told a rally outside NSW Parliament in late November that, if approved, the proposed sand mine would be proof that planning

...Continued on page 6

Fighting for Higher Education

The government's educational privatisation agenda already wreaking havoc with our schools system is currently being extended into the higher education sector via the biggest legislative shake up for our universities since the Dawkins reforms in the late eighties.

There are many unwelcome elements to the government's package including attacks on student organisations, democratic governance, university independence, and staff unionism. The most significant feature is the shift of funding responsibility from public to private sources.

The public university system is already funded by a roughly 50/50 mix of private and public funding. (compared to an OECD average 25/75 private/public). The proposal to allow HECS fees to increase by 30% and for an increase in full-fee paying places for domestic students will deepen this trend toward making universities a user-pays system.

The Greens are opposing these changes in the federal parliament, and lobbying fellow senators to recognise the long-term impact of such moves to the accessibility, equity, and quality of the public university system.

The Greens will continue to articulate the wisdom of sustained public investment in public education from pre-school to university, and strive within the current debate to defend a vision of a comprehensive, equitable, accessible and high quality university system for Australia.

For more information see Kerry's comments to the Senate Inquiry: www.kerrynettle.org.au.

Greens E-Bulletin

Sign-up to receive the fortnightly listing of protest actions and events for Sydney and NSW.. To subscribe, email: james@nsw.greens.org.au

Privacy at risk

Hot on the heels of the savage budget cuts to the Anti-Discrimination Board and the abolition of the Inspector-General of Prisons, the Carr government is moving to abolish Privacy NSW and make the Ombudsman responsible for privacy. What's more, the power to exempt public agencies from privacy rules would be transferred to the Attorney-General.

It seems that post-election the government is moving to silence every body that exposed government mistakes during the last term. Privacy NSW investigated the infamous Cecil Hills High gun that never was, and produced a report critical of then Education Minister John Aquilina. The good news is that the Bill seems destined for defeat, at least for 2003.

Ports plan missing

Carr is trying to con the people of Wollongong and Newcastle by saying that their ports will grow if Sydney Harbour's are shut. Very little freight passes through Sydney Harbour - most goes to Port Botany, where the government is pushing ahead with an environmentally disastrous upgrade. The Greens say scrap the Port Botany upgrade and send the work to the regions.

Lee Rhiannon successfully moved in Parliament to force the government to release its touted "Ports Growth Plan". All the government could come up with was a pile of media clippings. The reality is that the Ports Growth Plan was just another Carr media stunt.

Greens MPs e-brief

The Greens MPs put out a fortnightly e-brief, which contains the latest Greens news - information on the work of Greens MPs in and outside parliament, coming events, job vacancies.

If you are not subscribed send an email to: lee.rhiannon@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Carr violence escalation

Despite the passing in NSW of laws addressing every aspect of the major parties get topugh on crime agenda regular shootings are continuing in Sydney with the result that more people are dieing and being injured and the level of fear in many communities is rising.

The rhetoric being used by NSW Premier Bob Carr on these matters does nothing more than escalate an already violent situation. After using the term 'ethnic gang' in a racist way he is now using terms like 'war', 'battle' and 'terror' in a way that adds a sense of bravado to the shootings. Lee Rhiannon has accused the Premier of escalating the current situation by effectively throwing out a challenge to young men, who already feel alienated.

The Greens are continuing to call for a ban on all semi-automatic handguns. After the Port Arthur massacre semi-automatic long arms were banned across Australia. Now it is time to ban the handguns as well. Lee Rhiannon has been working on this issue for many years and following the latest round of shootings she called on Premier Bob Carr to take a lead on gun control and to stop using the federal inaction as an excuse for his own tardiness on this issue.

Demise of Coastal Council

The NSW Coastal Council has been abandoned by the Carr Government, leaving the state's coastline vulnerable to increased development pressures and "cowboys" seeking to indiscriminately clear large areas of native bushland.

Ian Cohen raised the issue at a meeting with Planning Minister Craig Knowles in November and warned that without an independent body to monitor development along the coast, the dodgy deals and large-scale destructive clearing of the nineties may happen again.

The proposed Natural Resources Commission Bill provided no guarantees that coastal protection would remain a priority. The devil is

in the detail and the detail is hidden in the regulations that no one has seen. It is critical that NSW retains an independent monitor of coastal clearing and development.

Refugee rights

In November, the Greens hosted 'Forgotten Rights' a summit on the health of detained asylum seekers and their children. Sylvia Hale hosted the summit, held at NSW Parliament House, which was a great success.

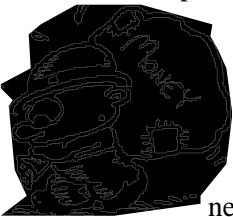
Kerry Nettle addressed the conference, whereas all other political parties declined invitations to attend. Sylvia also met with asylum seekers in Villawood Detention Centre on an unofficial visit.

The Greens campaign on state services for temporary protection visa holders has had some success. After pressure from the Greens, the NSW Government announced funding for educational programs for TPV holders in NSW. However, TPV holders in NSW still have no access to public housing or first night accommodation when they are released from detention.



Developer donations

On November 13 Lee Rhiannon introduced and spoke to the *Developer Donations (Anti-Corruption) Bill*, which bans developer donations to political parties and candidates. For a copy of the Bill or Lee's speech, visit www.parliament.nsw.gov.au or email lee.rhiannon@parliament.nsw.gov.au.



That same day, Labor held one of its increasingly frequent corporate fundraising dinners. A vibrant protest was held outside, highlighting the undemocratic influence of those paying \$11,000 a table for access to power.

Photos from the protest are at www.lee.greens.org.au.

Flawed Senate reform

Michael Organ recently spoke in parliament against the Prime Minister's proposed Senate reforms. If the Prime Minister has his way, the Senate, a legitimate and important arm of our democracy, would no longer have any real or effective power.

In the words of Harry Evans, the Clerk of the Senate:

"Mr Howard's proposal is that, whenever the Senate fails to pass government legislation, the government should be able to hold a joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament to pass that legislation. The flaw in this proposal has been readily identified: it would allow the government (except in the unusual circumstances of a government majority of only one or two seats in the House of Representatives) to pass any and all legislation without regard to the Senate. With this power, a government could pass legislation to avoid scrutiny of its actions and to perpetuate itself in power, for example, by altering the electoral law."

No Mandate: In the past 30 years, the Senate has blocked less than 3 per cent of legislation. Of the Howard Government's 1238 pieces of legislation, only 33 have been voted down or laid aside – even less than this 3 per cent figure. The Senate does have a mandate for this. Consider the last federal election: the Liberal Party won a landslide of lower house seats, but its lower house primary vote was only 37.1 per cent. That's all John Howard's "mandate" really amounts to.

The Greens are firmly opposed to Howard's plan to take away the essential power of one of our Houses of Parliament and we will fight Howard's plans in the community and ensure that the Australian people are aware that John Howard wishes to deal a fatal blow to our assurance of democratic representation.

Bushfire blame game

Throwing money at more hazard reduction will not save lives and property from an increasing threat of severe bushfires, Ian Cohen said in response to the final report of the House of Representatives Select Committee into the Recent Australian Bushfires. Ian cautioned against simply focusing on whom to blame for the recent intense fires. Every extreme bushfire is followed by noisy calls for the incineration of bushland as though it would solve all of our problems. Hazard reduction burning will not work on its own.

Greater co-operation is needed between public land managers, including between states and territories, so that planning for fires is thorough and more effective. The community, too, must become more involved. Community-based planning, where residents are shown how to better prepare their properties, would prevent a situation such as in January 2003 arising again where people living on the edge of bush areas, in fire prone areas, are caught unprepared.

Dissenting Bushfire Report

Michael Organ recently tabled his dissenting report into the Federal inquiry into the recent Australian bushfires. The Inquiry, which was highly publicised and politicised, received over 500 submissions. This was Michael's first time on a parliamentary committee and he found the work challenging and informative. Michael was concerned that much of the evidence presented to the committee was in many ways biased towards a 'pro-burning' stance.

Whilst the Greens are not opposed to hazard reduction burning, we do have real concerns that major damage is being done by too much burning in certain areas under certain circumstances such as in especially sensitive areas. Michael's extensive dissenting report reflects these concerns, plus a variety of other issues which were raised in the committee's main report.



CONTACTS

Federal Parliament

Senator Kerry Nettle

Senator.Nettle@aph.gov.au

Sydney Office

Ph 9690 2038 Fax 9690 2041

Ground Floor, 111-117 Devonshire St
Surry Hills NSW 2010

Canberra Office

Ph 6277 3501 Fax 6277 5716

Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600
www.kerrynette.org.au

Staff: Jon Edwards, Katrina Willis, Elise Staples, Tanya Excell, Melanie Gillbank

Michael Organ MP

Member for Cunningham

Michael.Organ.MP@aph.gov.au

Electorate Office

Ph 4283 7300 Fax 4283 7800

Suite 7, 83-85 Railway St, Corrimal
PO Box 246, Corrimal NSW 2518

Canberra Office

Ph 6277 4366 Fax 6277 8472

House of Representatives
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600
www.michaelorgan.org.au

Staff: Carol Berry, Kristian Bolwell,
Allen Clark, Jason Hart, Theresa Huxtable, Damien Cahill, Sharon Callaghan

The Greens NSW Parliamentary Office

Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney 2000

Sylvia Hale, MLC

sylvia.hale@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Ph: 9230 3030 Fax: 9230 2519

Staff: Mithra Cox, Seb Crawford,

Lee Rhiannon, MLC

lee.rhiannon@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Ph 9230 3551 Fax 9230 3550

www.nsw.greens.org.au/lee

Staff: Hans van Leeuwen, Cate Faehrmann

Ian Cohen, MLC

ian.cohen@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Ph 9230 2603 Fax 9230 2267

www.nsw.greens.org.au/ian

Staff: Jenny Emblem, Paul Sheridan,
Jan Barham

Trading away democracy

The Australian government is currently negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA) with the US. The Australian Government is gearing itself up to trade-off the ability of all future governments in Australia to effectively regulate in the public or environmental interest. The FTA negotiation process lacks transparency or democratic safeguards. It does not need to be agreed to by either house of parliament, only signed off on by the Cabinet. Specific social policies under threat from this agreement include our GE labelling laws, quarantine regulations, cultural support mechanisms and regulations.

Greens are working with many different organisations in a campaign against the AUSFTA. Senator Kerry Nettle's office has produced two Greens Action Kits on the FTA, organised demonstrations and public meetings in Sydney and Canberra.

Kerry is a member of a Senate Committee looking at the impacts of GATS and the AUSTFA. The report is due to be released soon.

The Australian and US Green Parties are working on a joint anti-AUSFTA statement. Support the Greens campaign against the FTA, and for fair trade: Fax & email Trade Minister Mark Vaile starting on the 1st of December: Mark.Vaile.MP@aph.gov.au or fax 02 6271 4128.

Industrial Manslaughter Bill

The Federal government's Building and Construction Improvement bills are certain to result in more deaths and serious injuries on and near building sites.

If these bills become law, the construction industry will be transformed into one where workers cannot protect and advance their interests without first scaling legal and administrative mountains in a workplace where managerial discretion will rule the day. This legislative straight jacket is certain to make it harder for workers and their unions to campaign against unsafe work practices that affect individual building sites as well as the industry as a whole.

To counter the Howard government's proposals Greens MP Michael Organ will be introducing a Workplace Death and Serious Injury Private Member's Bill into the House of Representatives as an amendment to these manifestly unsafe proposed building and construction industry laws. Michael's bill amends the Commonwealth Criminal Code by creating an offence of Industrial Manslaughter that would provide for gaol terms of up to 25 years for employers that negligently kill their workers and 10 years in cases of serious injury. Additionally, fines of up to \$50 million could be served upon negligent corporations in the same circumstances. These gaol terms merely mirror the current provisions for manslaughter in existing NSW criminal law. Michael's bill will promote industrial peace and goodwill in the long term between workers, their unions and employers, which will only benefit the broader community.

Sand Mining threat ...continued from page 3.

...systems had failed the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

It would establish a dangerous precedent for development on the doorsteps of World Heritage Areas that would damage the value of World Heritage listing. Sand mining was previously rejected in the same area because it was clearly at odds with the goals of environment protection and nature conservation. The Department of Planning refused it last time because "mining is not considered to be a suitable use due to its degrading effect and possible damage to the national park and the water quality of the Wollangambe River".